



Sunday, September 15, 2016, marked the 15th anniversary of what has come to be known as 9/11. It was September 11, 2001, when the Islamic extremist group al-Qaeda high jacked four airliners and carried out suicide attacks against US targets. Two planes flew into the World Trade Center towers in New York City. A third plane hit the Pentagon and the fourth plane crashed in a field in western Pennsylvania. More than 3,000 people were killed during the attacks in New York City and DC.

What do our teachers, administrators, and staff remember about that day?

Roni Gingrich, the secretary at Falling Spring Elementary, remembers that a parent called her to tell her what happened. “There was only one TV in the building at the time and it wasn’t working. I asked a custodian to try to fix it for me and he did. We started to watch what was happening.”

Mary Jane Torri, who teaches 4th and 5th graders today, taught recalled that her students were at physical education class and she joined Roni and the custodian to “watch the horror”.

“The phone started to ring and parents came to pick up their students,” recalled Mrs. Gingrich.

“I remember thinking what is happening? Why is this happening? Will there be more as I watched the plane crash into the tower. I couldn’t help think how am I going to keep it together without the students knowing I am upset? I was very worried that a student might come in late from an appointment and tell the class what had happened,” Mrs. Torri recalled.

“Kids can read you. I was trying very hard to look for the positive that day,” Mrs. Torri said. “I was also concerned about how the adults were dealing with this catastrophe.”

“It was a different time. We didn’t have social media. I think, too, that if you knew someone who worked in the towers or the Pentagon, the stress was unbelievable,” said Mary Osterman, head teacher at Falling Spring.

“Our focus also went to the next day. What were we going to do with the students? Were we going to talk about this?” Mrs. Osterman added.

“Over time we had more discussion of the events that occurred on 9/11 with the students. But, it is interesting today that the students have no reference of the events of that day,” Mrs. Osterman added.

“We had to stick to the curriculum and the daily schedule. Our number one job was to focus on our students. That is what we do every day and that day we had to do the very same thing. It’s just what we do,” said Mrs. Torri.

Catherine Dusman, now a district assistant superintendent was an assistant principal at CAMS – then there was only one middle school with over 3,000 students – remembers at first she thought there had been a terrible accident, she did not even think about terrorism.

“Our principal, head secretary, and several teachers were in the process of meeting a deadline for the national Blue Ribbon award. I was in the front lobby and someone called my attention to the TV. I couldn’t believe it and truly believed it was an accident. I thought maybe the pilot had had a stroke or a heart attack. When the second plane hit, that was a very defining moment. I remember hearing panicked voices on the TV. The phone started to ring in the office. I informed our head principal. We quickly started to wonder after the Pentagon was hit. Could Letterkenny be a target? What about Camp David?” Mrs. Dusman recounted.

“We put the students and safety first which, of course, is what we always do. We kept students inside. There was no outdoor recess. We sent an email to teachers, but we did not inform the students of the events until the end of the day because many students were going to board buses with high school students who were informed. As the day progressed, parents began to arrive to take their children home. The phones rang relentlessly. It was the worst day of my career. It was an incredible emotional experience,” Mrs. Dusman said very solemnly.